

Vienna,
June 15, '85.

Dear friends in Malaysia,

I rejoice in the fact that you are so active in helping to explain the Dhamma to others. I appreciate it that I keep on hearing from you and receive letters with requests for articles for your magazines. I think that you would like to hear about the way how Dhamma is practised in daily life.

The Buddha spoke about what is real: physical phenomena or rūpas and mental phenomena or nāmas. When we develop right understanding of nāma and rūpa the wrong view of self can be eradicated. The development of right understanding is difficult for all of us, but the objects of which right understanding should be developed are right at hand: the body, feelings, moments of consciousness (cittas) and all other realities (dhammas) of our daily life.

We read in the 'Dīghanakhasutta' (Middle Length Sayings II, no. 74) that the Buddha, when he was staying near Rājagaha on Mount Vulture Peak, ~~spoke to~~ the wanderer Dīghanaka about the casting out of wrong views. He reminded him that the body is susceptible to decay, impermanent and not self:

But this body, Aggivessana, which has material shape, is made up of the four great elements, originating from mother and father, nourished on gruel and sour milk, of a nature to be constantly rubbed away, pounded away, broken up and scattered, should be regarded as impermanent, suffering, as a disease, an imposthume, a dart, a misfortune, an affliction, as other, as decay, empty, not-self. When he regards this body as impermanent, suffering, as a disease, an imposthume, a dart, a misfortune, an affliction, as other, as decay, empty, not-self, whatever in regard to body is desire for body, affection for body, subordination to body, this is got rid of.

The body is made up of the four great elements ~~which are:~~
solidity (earth), ~~appearing as hardness or softness~~
cohesion (water), ~~appearing as~~
temperature (fire),
motion (wind or air).

These are four kinds of rūpa which are always present, wherever there is materiality, no matter it is of the body or outside the body. Solidity, temperature and motion can be experienced through the body-sense whenever they impinge on it. The bodysense is all over the body, wherever there is sensitivity. Bodysense is rūpa, it does not experience anything, it is different from nāma which experiences an object. Bodysense is the doorway through which solidity, temperature and motion can be experienced. They are experienced by the nāma which is body-consciousness. Cohesion cannot be experienced through the ~~body-door~~, it can only be experienced through the mind-door.

motion, appearing as motion or pressure.

~~Mxx~~

Hardness is a reality, a rūpa which can be directly experienced when it appears, we do not need to think of it or ~~to~~ name it. Hardness is always hardness, no matter it is of the body or of the tree. When heat appears, it can be directly experienced, ~~xxxx~~ we do not have to think of it or ~~to~~ name it. Heat is always heat, no matter it is of the body, ~~xx~~ of fire or ~~the sunx~~ of the sun. We cling to our bodyheat, but it is only the element of heat, a kind of rūpa.

We read that the body is a disease, or an affliction. Can we see the body as such? Perhaps we understand in theory that the body ~~xxxx~~ consists of rūpas which are impermanent and not self, but do we experience the truth already? When we are sincere to ourselves we must admit that we still cling to the body. ^{In order to} ~~How can we~~ experience the truth and eradicate wrong views, we should first know the difference between what is not real and what is real. Person, body, ~~xx~~ car or house are concepts we can think of, but they are not realities which can be directly experienced. ~~Namx~~ Nāmas and rūpas are realities, they can be ^(directly) experienced one at a time, when they appear, without the being the need to think about them or to name them. Moments of consciousness, cittas, are realities, feelings are realities, attachment and generosity are realities. They are mental phenomena, they ~~xxxxxx~~ experience something. As we have seen, hardness ^{and} heat are realities, they are rūpas, physical phenomena which do not know anything. When we have understood the difference between what is ~~xx~~ not real and what is real, there are conditions for ~~mindfulness~~ the arising of mindfulness.

We may wonder how we can begin to be mindful of nāma and rūpa. Is there not an object impinging on one of the six doors? Often there is forgetfulness and we are thinking of concepts such as persons or 'things', we are absorbed in stories. Sometimes there can be mindfulness, non-forgetfulness, of a characteristic of a reality, which ~~appears through one of the six doors.~~

Mindfulness is a type of nāma and it is mindful of a reality which can be directly experienced. There is no mindfulness of a hand, of the voice of someone or of a chair, since these are concepts. ~~We can think about concepts but they are not realities in the absolute sense, paramattha dhammas, which can be directly experienced.~~ There can be mindfulness of one reality at a time when it appears through one of the six doors. When hardness appears, there can be mindfulness of that characteristic and then there is no clinging to a concept of 'my hand' which is hard, or 'the table' which is hardness.

My husband said that he found it difficult to accept that there is no person, only nāmas and rūpas. We were both present when my mother passed away. So long as we are alive, we are breathing. It is citta which conditions breath. My mother's breath suddenly stopped and then we knew that she had died. When we touched her body it became clear to us that the body was not my mother, that it had nothing to do with my mother. The Buddha spoke about the body which is like a corpse and reminded people that also the living body is like a corpse. No matter whether the body is dead or alive, it consists of rūpas which do not stay and which are not self. My husband finds it now easier to accept that there is no person. However, this is still intellectual understanding which is different from direct experience of the truth. The wisdom (paññā) which directly experiences the truth grows through mindfulness of nāma and rūpa.

Our life consists of nāmas and rūpas. When we walk, when we move our limbs and gesticulate there are bodily phenomena, rūpas, and these are conditioned by consciousness, citta. Bodily movements and also facial movements are ~~rūpas~~ the rūpa which is 'bodily intimation' (in Pāli: kāya-viññatti). We can notice that our different moods are expressed ^{by} our face. We look different when we are happy or sad/. In the case of non-arahats bodily intimation is conditioned by kusala citta (wholesome consciousness) or by akusala citta (unwholesome consciousness). Akusala citta arise many more times than kusala citta. Even when we do not perform evil deeds such as killing or stealing, there can still be akusala citta. Akusala citta has different degrees of unwholesomeness; ~~it~~ ^{it} may be coarse, when we perform evil deeds, but it can also be more subtle. There may be akusala citta rooted in attachment (lobha-mūla-citta) or akusala citta rooted in aversion (dosa-mūla-citta) or akusala citta rooted in ignorance (moha-mūla-citta), even when one does not perform evil deeds. Whenever we are not intent on dāna (generosity), sīla (morality), or bhāvanā (mental development), we act and speak with akusala citta. Our facial movements and our gestures are more often conditioned by akusala citta than by kusala citta. Bodily intimation ^{may be} conditioned by kusala citta when we, for example, stretch out our hands in order to give or when we by gesture show respect to bhikkhus or elderly people. However, there may also be selfish ~~and~~ motives when we are doing so, or we may be ~~insincere~~ insincere, and then there are akusala citta which condition bodily intimation.

We express our intentions not only by gestures but also by speech. Speech intimation ~~is a~~ (vacī viññatti) is a physical function, a quality of rūpa, which is, in the case of non-arahats, conditioned by kusala citta or by akusala citta. Most of the time we speak with akusala citta. Even when we do not lie or slander, akusala citta can condition our speech. When we want to gain something for ourselves, when we want to be popular, we speak with citta rooted in attachment. Do we not often speak just for the sake of speaking, in order to keep the conversation going? We cling to speech, we tend to feel lonely when we are not engaged in a conversation. We do not want to be overlooked, we want to be 'somebody'. However, in reality there is no self or 'somebody', there are only nāma-elements and rūpa-elements which arise and then fall away immediately. One day at a dinner party the people at the table who were sitting on my right and on my left side were not talking to me, but to their neighbours on the other sides. I had at first the wish to engage in a conversation, but then I remembered that speaking just for the sake of speaking is useless, motivated by akusala citta. I remembered that there are nāmas and ~~rūpas~~ rūpas appearing through six doors all the time and that one can be aware of those.

We are bound to speak with akusala citta; so long as we have not eradicated akusala there are conditions for akusala citta. However,

it is useful to get to know the motives of one's actions and speech. In being mindful of realities one will know oneself. We will know that behaviour and speech we used to take for pleasing and agreeable can be motivated and is often motivated by akusala cittas. Don't we often think of our own advantage?

When we realize that often akusala cittas condition our gestures and speech, we will have more understanding of the Buddha's exhortation in the 'Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta' (Middle Length Sayings, I, no. 10) in the section on mindfulness of the body, where the Buddha says that one should develop a 'clear comprehension', in walking, in standing, in sitting, in sleeping, in waking, in speaking and in keeping silence. Do we realize that most of the time akusala cittas condition our bodily movements when we are bending, stretching, walking, eating, during all our activities? When we walk up and down or we reach for a book there are bound to be akusala cittas which condition our bodily movements, even when we do not ~~think anything~~ notice unwholesome motives. When we remember this we will be urged to be mindful of nāma and rūpa, so that right understanding can be developed.

We read in the same sutta that ~~the~~ a bhikkhu, when he is going ~~knows~~ knows, 'I am going'. And the same with regard to standing, sitting and lying down. One may misunderstand this passage and believe that ~~there~~ mindfulness means knowing what one is doing. The Commentary to this sutta (~~the~~ in the 'Papañcasūdanī', ~~which commentary~~ in the translation by Soma Thera, B.P.S. Kandy) explains that also dogs and jackals know when they are moving, ~~that~~ that they are moving :

...But this instruction on the modes of ~~deportment~~ was not given concerning similar awareness, because awareness of that sort ~~belonging~~ belonging to animals does not shed the belief in a living being, does not knock out the percept of a soul and neither becomes a subject of meditation nor the development of the arousing of mindfulness.

When one goes one knows that one is going, but there should also be mindfulness of nāma and rūpa, so that one realizes that not a self or person is going, that there are mere processes going on. We read in the same commentary further on, about going forwards, that a ← monk without confusing himself thinks:

When there is the arising in one of the thought 'I am going forwards', just with that thought, appears the process of oscillation (the element of air or motion) originating from mind which brings to birth bodily expression (or intimation, kāya-viññatti). Thus by the way of the diffusion of the process of oscillation due to mental activity, this skeleton called the body goes forward.

Here we are reminded again that there is no living being, only elements.

In the 'Dīghanāka-sutta' which I quoted above, we read that the Buddha, after he explained about the body, spoke about feelings.

The Buddha said to Dīghanakha (Aggivessana) that there are three feelings: pleasant feeling, unpleasant feeling and indifferent feeling. When pleasant feeling arises, there cannot be the two other kinds of feeling at that moment, and it is the same when unpleasant feeling or when indifferent feeling arises. There can be only one kind of feeling at a time. We then read:

... Pleasant feelings, Aggivessana, are impermanent, compounded, generated by conditions, liable to destruction, liable to decay, liable to fading away, liable to stopping. And painful feelings... And, Aggivessana, feelings that are neither painful nor pleasant are impermanent, compounded, generated by conditions, liable to destruction, liable to decay, liable to fading away, liable to stopping. Seeing it thus, Aggivessana, an instructed disciple of the Ariyans turns away from ~~painful feelings~~, pleasant feelings, and he turns away from painful feelings, and he turns away from feelings that are neither painful nor pleasant; turning away he is dispassionate, being dispassionate he is freed, in freedom the knowledge comes to be that he is freed and he comprehends: 'Destroyed is birth, brought to a close is the Brahma-faring, done is what was to be done, there is no more of being such or so.'

When the Buddha taught Dhamma to Dīghanakha, Sāriputta was standing behind the Buddha, fanning the Lord, and he reflected on his words. He became an arahat and Dīghanakha became a sotāpanna. ~~He may wonder how~~

We may wonder how one can become an arahat by knowing that there can be only one feeling at a time and that feelings are generated by conditions and impermanent. When people read about feelings and other realities, some may ~~merely~~ consider this subject ^{merely} theoretical knowledge while others may realize that realities are to be ~~experienced at the~~ directly known at the present moment, in order to realize their true nature. Sāriputta and Dīghanakha were mindful of the present moment while they listened to the Buddha's words. It depends on one's accumulated understanding to what extent one can see reality as it is. When there are conditions for it, one could even attain enlightenment while reading or discussing about realities.

When we are mindful of the nāma or rūpa which appears at the present moment we will understand the meaning of what the Buddha taught. We will understand that whatever appears arises because of its appropriate conditions and that it is impossible to change it. I had to wait for my husband at the airport for more than two hours, since the plane was delayed. It was very cold and windy and the seat was uncomfortable. I was at that time reading the part of the Dīghanakha-sutta about feelings. This sutta reminded me of reality. There were unpleasant objects and on account of these objects unpleasant feeling arose. We do not like unpleasant feeling, but when there are conditions for it it arises. When it is time for unpleasant feeling, there cannot be pleasant feeling or indifferent feeling. When we have more understanding that phenomena which arise ~~are~~ do so because of their own ~~unhappy~~ conditions, we will be less inclined to waste time wishing for another

another situation and we will be more patient. What ~~xy~~ should be done is being aware of what appears at the present moment, no matter it is pleasant or unpleasant, wholesome or unwholesome. We can prove to ourselves that, when we have no wish to change what has arisen already, there are conditions for mindfulness of whatever reality appears.

With mettā,
Nina van Gorkom.

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